

## BOOK REVIEWS

SONG, YUWU. **Building Better Web Sites: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians.** New York, NY: Neal-Schuman, 2003. 359 p. \$75. ISBN 1-55570-466-2. ☺

Song has written a comprehensive overview of the many technologies and issues associated with building library Websites. Acknowledging that a Website may be the *only* contact many patrons have with a library, Song lays out a systematic approach to creating functional and appealing Web pages. The beginning chapters present a nontechnical introduction and lay out a course for readers who are motivated to begin designing and ultimately continue managing a library Website. While many Web page how-to guides of late assume that readers have already built a Website, the word "building" in Song's title means literally starting from scratch. The book's step-by-step format makes it a valuable resource, especially for the novice Web page designers. While many advanced Web design issues are covered later in the book, it starts at the beginning of the journey of designing a Web page, offering practical advice and ample concrete examples from a variety of libraries along the way.

The book also provides relevant material for the more experienced Web page designer. Subsequent chapters delve into the more technical issues at hand, including Java animations and extensible markup language (XML). The useful aspect of this format is that readers can pick and choose the chapters according to their needs. The individual chapters are well organized and arranged in an easy-to-follow beginning-to-advanced continuum. One of the dilemmas in writing a book with such breadth is the necessity to consolidate various discussions and address them as concisely as possible. Song's book handles this well by giving a broad overview, but also by focusing on explanations of common problems, like why graphics interchange format (GIF) files are so pixilated. As is always the case with Web books,

some of the examples are dated, including references to Dreamweaver 4 and a focus on applets in the Java section.

Another feature suggested by the title, *Building Better Web Sites*, is that the book would be a good resource for improving existing Websites and address usability issues. While basic practical advice in this area is offered and an accompanying CD gives examples, readers may find the section on usability limited. What *Building Better Web Sites* does best is provide librarians with an informative introduction to the principles of Web page design and a practical guide to developing and maintaining Web pages for libraries.

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KANE, LAURA TOWNSEND. **Straight from the Stacks: A Firsthand Guide to Careers in Library and Information Science.** Chicago, IL: American Library Association (ALA), 2003. 155 p. \$30.60 ALA members, \$34.00 nonmembers. ISBN 0-8389-0865-9. ☺

**The Image and Role of the Librarian.** Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Information Press, 2003. Edited by Wendi Arant and Candace R. Benefiel. 186 p. Softcover, \$24.95. ISBN: 0-7890-2099-8. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN: 0-7890-2098-X. Copublished as **The Reference Librarian**, 2002 37; (78). ☺

As librarianship struggles to replenish its ranks with the best and brightest new recruits, it is worthwhile to reflect on what attracted librarians to the field in the past, the myriad challenges faced by practicing librarians in different settings, and the perceptions of librarians in the media and real life.

*Straight from the Stacks* is edited by Kane, the head of cataloging and acquisitions at the University of

South Carolina School of Medicine in Columbia. The book serves two purposes: to promote librarianship as a viable career option and to provide useful, practical information to practicing librarians curious about other career opportunities.

This upbeat work spotlights the career paths taken by thirty-three public, school, academic, and special librarians working in traditional and nontraditional settings. The typical reader will be delighted with how Kane weaves her insightful commentary into the riveting firsthand accounts. The collective talent, experience, and wisdom are impressive and beautifully conveyed. Profiles are supplemented with useful information describing the work environment, typical duties, education and training, recommended memberships, and bibliographic notes for each type of librarian. Practical advice includes recommended library school courses, professional organizations, professional publications, and opportunities for promotion. Most of the profiles feature a photograph of the librarian. Medical librarians will recognize present and former MLA members C. Trenton Boyd, Stewart Brower, Linda Coates, Linda Ann Kaczmarczyk, Pamela Anderson Kerns, Wayne J. Peay, Michele R. Tennant, and the late Daniel C. Horne.

*Straight from the Stacks* is recommended for persons considering librarianship, library school students, entry-level librarians, and mid-career librarians alike.

*The Image and Role of the Librarian* covers past and present images and perceptions of librarians in literature, entertainment, and actual work settings. Editors Arant and Benefiel are employed at Texas A&M University Libraries as outreach services librarian and senior humanities reference librarian, respectively. Originally published as an issue of the Haworth Information Press's *The Reference Librarian* periodical, the ten contributed articles focus on four major areas of concern: professional roles, cultural images, popular perceptions, and future trends.

The "Professional Roles" section includes "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Librarians Have Been Viewed Over Time," which summarizes views of librarians from the early eighteenth century to the present, and "Looking Back to the Future: Turn of the Last Century Librarians Look Ahead to the Twentieth Century," which reviews depictions of libraries and librarians in nineteenth and twentieth century American and British library literature.

Three chapters are featured in the "Cultural Images" section. "Jungian/Myers-Briggs Personality Types of Librarians in Films" uses personality typology to categorize library characters in twenty-eight films. "The Long, Strange Trip of Barbara Gordon: Images of Librarians in Comic Books" compares past stereotypical depictions in comic books to more recent ones. "Librarians in Children's Literature, 1909-2000" analyzes library characters in thirty-five children's books published in the United States from 1909 to 2000.

"Popular Perceptions" includes chapters on male librarian stereotypes from colonial America to the present day, know-it-all and know-nothing librarians, and survey findings of how forty-eight undergraduate students perceive academic librarians.

The two chapters in the "Future Trends" section discuss the perceived roles of education librarians and expectations and challenges of Generation X, Y, and D librarians. Library school students and librarians interested in how they are portrayed in the popular media and concerned about issues related to professional identity will appreciate this work.

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JANES, JOSEPH. **Introduction to Reference Work in the Digital Age.** New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2003, 213 p. Softcover, \$59.95. ISBN: 1-55570-429-8. ©

"In the beginning, there was no reference." The service, which seems to be synonymous with libraries, has a relatively recent history, according to Janes, chair of library and information science at the University of Washington and founder of the Internet Public Library. Janes lays a foundation for discussing digital reference services by giving a history of reference work in American libraries, citing references back to 1876. He is passionate about reference work and shares ideas on librarianship as a profession, resources, and techniques.

The next two chapters, which constitute more than half the book, continue to describe fundamental reference work, first by presenting the need to understand users and then the need to plan for today's reference services. Janes gives considerable attention to the reference interview, including traditional as well as modern methods of conducting the interview. Reference interviews have evolved with each new technology, from the use of the telephone to electronic mail, to Web-based forms, to chat rooms. The way reference librarians respond to queries has also evolved, and great detail is given to mediation and searching; choosing the right resources, both print and digital; and guidelines and policies for providing service. Several examples of forms, Web-based services, problems, and successes are given.

Chapter 4 begins the technological aspects of reference in the digital age. Some readers might think this was the purpose of the book from its title, but it is refreshing to have information needs considered before the technology, rather than technology pushing the direction of the information services. Janes describes the technologies, designs,

evaluations, successes, glitches, and examples of some leading projects. Chapter 5 outlines the necessary changes in staff, development, training, retooling, restructuring, resources, and licensing agreements brought about by Internet-based reference services. Chapter 6, "Making It Work," provides major points to consider when planning new reference services and emphasizes the need for vision. Janes warns about politics, planning, evaluation, and complacency. The final chapter reinforces the ideas of evaluation and repeats many of the ideas covered in the previous chapters, translating traditional reference services into digital age services.

Janes begins each chapter with an outline of the purpose and ends each chapter with questions for review, endnotes or footnotes, and references. The questions are meant to stimulate further reflection or to be used in a classroom. His style fluctuates from being rather informal, as if he were chatting, to being very clear and concise, so readers do not miss his point.

Janes has written about the changing realm of reference services. He has written for librarians new to the profession, for librarians who have grown up with changes, and for librarians who have pushed those changes. Although he limits his discussions to the public and academic library settings and does not mention the interesting development of medical reference services, this should not deter anyone from reading *Introduction to Reference Work in the Digital Age*. Some basics are constants. Students and newer librarians reading this book would have a good foundation and sense of the service involved in reference work. Seasoned librarians would sense that their work has brought library service well into this era of transition.

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